

DUBOIS, JESSE KILGORE

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Abraham Lincoln's Contemporaries

Jesse Kilgore Dubois

Excerpts from newspapers and other
sources

From the files of the
Lincoln Financial Foundation Collection

In depicting any period, one spirit hovers ever near, changing the course of all events, for no-one may withstand the hand of Death. To each his appointed time, and on March 11, 1816, the waters of the Little Wabash in Clay County, Illinois, not far from Vincennes, closed over the soldier and citizen, Toussaint Dubois.

On his way from visiting Pierre Menard at their store in Kaskaskia, with saddle bags heavily loaded, and accompanied by a negro slave, Dubois attempted to ford this stream recently swollen by heavy rains, but the undercurrent was too swift and he sank to rise no more.

The "Western Sun" on March 16, 1816, contains this notice:

"On Monday last, in attempting to cross the Little Wabash River, was drowned Major Toussaint Dubois. In him, the poor have lost a benefactor, his country a friend. He was a kind husband, an indulgent father and an honest man."

Nobility of character is strongly emphasized in the life of Toussaint Dubois. His untiring services in the early days of this country toward the colonization of the whites and the civilization of the Indians entitle him to a prominent place on the Honor Roll of the Nation, while his own State of Indiana—the scene of his heroic work—should consider it a duty and a privilege to proclaim his deeds to succeeding generations through the erection of suitable monuments and tablets to his memory,—particularly in the county created after his death which bears his name.

The mantle of the father often enwraps to some extent at least the son, and a glance at the passing years brings into view Major Toussaint Dubois' youngest son, Jesse Kilgore Dubois,—the warm personal friend and confidential advisor of Abraham Lincoln.

First seeing light, January 11, 1811, in the luxurious home of the Dubois overlooking the Wabash—the year in which his father, Capt. Toussaint Dubois, was winning renown in the Tippecanoe Campaign, Jesse Kilgore Dubois

grew to young manhood surrounded by the refinement of the Old French, the bravery of the frontiersman, and the patriotism of the defenders of the New Republic.

With the inherited desire of the pioneer for change and conquest, Jesse Kilgore Dubois early sought a new home amidst the rolling prairies of the present state of Illinois. He was a legislator from 1834 to 1844, voted for the removal of the capital from Vandalia to Springfield, was one of the first appointees of President William Henry Harrison as receiver of the land office at Palestine, having the same appointment from President Zachary Taylor; was elected county judge of Lawrence County, serving from 1853 to 1856; received the nomination and was elected state auditor on the first republican ticket, and was styled "The Nestor" of the War Cabinet of Governor Yates.

He exerted his influence in behalf of Grant, being made Colonel of the Twenty-First Regiment; his home became the political center of the State at which met statesmen from far and near, and he was member for Illinois of the National Executive Committee for the Northwest in the campaign of 1864.

When in attendance at the sessions of the Legislature at Springfield, Dubois lived in the home of James L. Lamb, whose daughter, Hannah, became the wife of General John M. Palmer, Governor of Illinois, from 1869 to 1873. On one of his trips, Dubois was accompanied by his cousin, Major Bowman of Virginia, who, meeting here another visitor, in the person of Mary Lamb, a cousin of the family, without delay fell in love with her, and proceeded to court and marry her.

Lincoln writes of this member of the Dubois Family, "My acquaintance first began with him in 1836. He was a member from Lawrence and Coles. Our friendship has continued and strengthened. When I first saw him he was a slim handsome young man, with auburn hair and sky-blue eyes, with the elegant manners of a Frenchman, from which nation he had his descent."

And again during his candidacy for the presidency,

Lincoln, in introducing Dubois to a friend writes: "You may safely confide in him and in all he would advise you to confide in."

While attending Asbury University, Jesse Kilgore Dubois married Nancy Batterton, of Kentucky, who at her death a few years later was placed by the side of their children in the American Catholic Cemetery at Vincennes, although her husband had, through the early training of his Scotch mother—Jane Baird Dubois—been reared a Protestant.

Jesse Kilgore Dubois accumulated a large estate in central Illinois, some of the property being within the present limits of Springfield—the Convent of the Sacred Heart, in the western part of that city being located on the Dubois land, and, in the same locality, the Dubois Public School, is a tribute to this early statesman of the Middle West.

In selecting his second wife, Dubois' choice fell upon Miss Delia Morris, of Lawrence County, who proved herself a most worthy helpmeet in the political and social life of her husband's later years, and side by side they lie in beautiful Oak Ridge Cemetery at Springfield, Illinois.

Many of the descendants of Jesse Kilgore Dubois are living, but again a haze envelops some of the panorama, for in these modern days, with the vast domain of the United States as well as the foreign countries so easy of access, it is difficult to correctly group the members of the different branches of any family, or, in fact, unless some particularly brilliant public service is rendered by an individual, to pay but little attention to the name.

In Crawford County, Illinois, near Vincennes, is recorded in 1845, the birth of a son bearing the name of the man so much admired by Jesse K. Dubois, and who later became his warm personal friend. Lincoln Dubois, a resident of the same city where lived the Great Emancipator when the Nation called him to its highest office, has in his possession a cane, cut from the wood found on the Lincoln birthplace in Kentucky, which was bequeathed him by the Martyred President.

In this same County, in 1851, was born another son of

Jesse Kilgore Dubois, by name Fred Toussaint Dubois. This young man graduated from Yale in 1872, and in 1875 became secretary of the board of Railroad and Warehouse Commissioners of Illinois. Possessing the inherent desire for locating in new fields, he engaged later in business in Idaho, was United States Marshal for four years, and represented his State as Senator in the Fiftieth and Fifty-First Congresses.

On the wall in Senator Fred Toussaint Dubois' home in Idaho there hangs an oil painting of Major Toussaint Dubois. Delicate of execution and probably the work of a French artist, this half length portrait of Major Dubois, in the prime of young manhood, presents a striking resemblance to Lafayette, Jefferson and Hamilton of the same period.

It would indeed seem strange if, in the capital city of Illinois, where lived the intimate friends Jesse Kilgore Dubois and Abraham Lincoln, there should not be at least one Dubois descendant.

The dissolving views show Susanne Dubois, daughter of Jesse Kilgore Dubois and Nancy Batterton Dubois, the wife of John B. Adams; they show also her last resting place in the old American and Catholic Cemetery at Vincennes, about fifty feet from the grave of Francis Vigo, whose history is closely interwoven with that of Toussaint Dubois in the early days of Indiana.

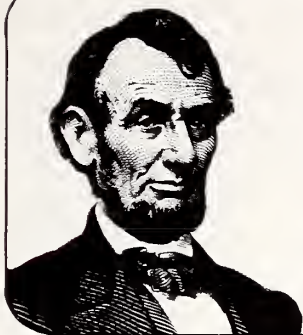
They show Susanne Dubois Adams' daughter, Agnes Harower Adams, the wife of Arthur Huntington, and their only child, Agnes Dubois Huntington, residing (1912) at Springfield, Illinois, and with them lives also Lincoln Dubois, the son of Jesse Kilgore Dubois.

In their home may be found the *eseritoire* with its spindle legs, sliding panels and secret drawers full of old documents (some of them relating to the early history of the Territory of Indiana) which stood in the Dubois Home on the bluffs above the Wabash. Here, too, are the old mantel clock whose dial is marked "Paris," and the rosewood medicine case with its bottles of medicine as in the childhood of

Jesse Kilgore Dubois, and the sword and pistol used by Major Toussaint Dubois.

Faithful citizen, statesman, soldier, loyal in service to country and fellow man, this is the record of Toussaint Dubois, whose legacy to succeeding generations is without price: the illustrious example of a noble life.

"This is the true pride of ancestry. It is founded in the tenderness with which the child regards the father, and in the romance that time sheds upon history."



Lincoln Lore

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BEEN TO SPRINGFIELD LATELY?

The answer every Lincoln enthusiast would like to be able to give is, yes. Of all the Lincoln sites in the country, none is as important as Springfield. Lincoln's home, his tomb, his law office, the legislature in which he served, the state supreme court before which he argued, and the railroad station from which he departed for Washington are in Springfield. The Illinois State Historical Library contains the research materials that all Lincoln students want and need to read. The whole environment is invigorating and always serves to spur enthusiasm for research on the life of America's most important President.

Springfield's ambience has always been conducive to learning about and appreciating Abraham Lincoln's life. Those of you who have not been to Springfield lately are in for a pleasant surprise when you return to this Lincoln mecca. The

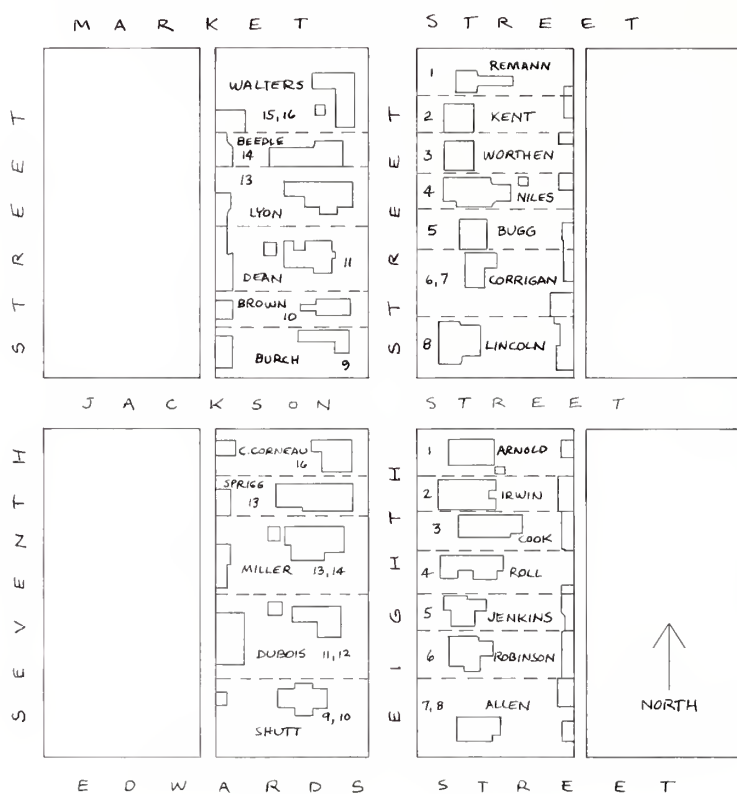
improvements in the Lincoln sites in recent years are far too numerous to catalogue here, but the most ambitious recent work deserves special notice.

The National Park Service, which administers the Lincoln Home National Historic Site, has embarked on a program to enhance the environment around the Lincoln home, pushing back the commercial blight which threatens so many of the nation's historic landmarks. The Lincoln home is not a brave little clapboard shrine bobbing on a sea of asphalt parking lots. It is not surrounded by tawdry curio-hawkers and phony museums which derive their only real element of authenticity from the genuine historic site they exploit and degrade. Visiting the Lincoln home consists of more than one briefly exhilarating encounter with an honest original preceded and followed by jarringly depressing confrontations with flim-



Courtesy National Park Service

FIGURE 1. William Beedle house.



From the Louis A. Warren
Lincoln Library and Museum

FIGURE 2. Map of Mr. Lincoln's neighborhood, adapted from the "Historical Base Map, 1860" drawn by the National Park Service.

flams and neon. It is, instead, a soothing, moving encounter with the environment of Abraham Lincoln's America.

Picket fences line the board sidewalks which lead the visitor through a four-block area the National Park Service describes as "Mr. Lincoln's neighborhood." At the rate of one house a year, the National Park Service has been restoring the homes around Lincoln's home to look, as nearly as possible, as they did in 1860. As always, the Park Service is willing to compromise with the inexorable ravages of time. Some homes are gone and probably cannot be replaced. Others cannot be reasonably restored to an 1860 state. In general, they will be more demanding of the buildings closest to the Lincoln home and allow more license in those further away. Near the Lincoln home, they may reconstruct a missing structure or two. All of the buildings will have information signs in front.

To date, the houses of William Beedle and George Shutt have undergone renovation. The Henson Robinson house is currently undergoing restoration (built in 1863, it is another of the Park Service's compromises). Others will follow in future years. Already, one feels more at ease in the area of the Lincoln home, and, when the project is completed, visitors will be able to stroll the streets of Lincoln's neighborhood much as he might have done himself.

Who were Lincoln's neighbors? George W. Shutt, who rented his home in 1860, was a young Democratic lawyer who spoke at a rally for Stephen A. Douglas in 1860. Members of the Shutt clan had been in Sangamon County for decades. Like many of Springfield's citizens, they had come from Virginia to Illinois via Kentucky. George's relationship with the other Shutt is not clear, but he had married a Virginian, Mary Osburn, and shared Democratic political sympathies with the earlier Shutt pioneers in Sangamon County.

William H. Beedle was also a renter. He made his living as a fireman, but little else is known of this man who was not a long-time Springfield resident.

Henson Robinson, on the other hand, lived in Springfield for more than forty years. Born in Xenia, Ohio, in 1839, he came to

Springfield in 1858. A tinner by trade, Robinson entered a partnership with George Bauman in 1861 to sell stoves, furnaces, and tinware. Contracts for the manufacture of soldiers' mess plates and tin cups during the Civil War brought prosperity. A Methodist and a temperance man, Robinson was nevertheless a member of the Democratic party while Lincoln was still in Springfield. The Sixteenth President, of course, never saw Robinson's house, but its style is in keeping with the other restorations, and retaining the structure helps maintain the urban flavor of fairly dense settlement proper for the Lincoln neighborhood.

Sarah Cook, Robinson's neighbor on the present site, was a widow with six children. She rented her home from John A. Mason and took in roomers to help make ends meet. Mrs. Cook was born in 1809 in Warren, Ohio. She moved to Illinois with her husband Eli and settled in Springfield around 1840. He was a hatter. Her husband died in 1853, and for a brief time she operated a photographic studio in Springfield.

Charles Arnold's house is near Mrs. Cook's but located on the rear of the lot it occupied in 1860. Arnold lived in the house from 1850 to the 1870s. Born in Massachusetts in 1809, this transplanted Yankee, like most of his fellow New Englanders in Illinois, was a Whig. In 1840 he had been elected County Treasurer, and he was twice elected Sheriff of Sangamon County (1848 and 1852). Public office and Whig affiliation as well as physical proximity made Arnold an acquaintance of Lincoln's. He was married and (in 1850) had three children.

An even more prominent politician in Lincoln's neighborhood was Jesse Kilgore Dubois. He built the home across the street from the Henson Robinson house in 1858 and resided there for most of his neighbor's Presidency. Dubois was born in southeastern Illinois in 1811. He served with Lincoln in the state legislature, and their mutual devotion to the Whig party forged a fairly close friendship. He named his second child by his second

wife Lincoln. Dubois moved into the Republican party in 1856. Elected State Auditor that year, he moved to Springfield to assume his office. Reelected in 1860, Dubois had worked hard for Lincoln's election too, and he was to be sorely disappointed when he proved to have but little influence on the administration's appointments. Dubois was a loyal partisan but a man of narrow horizons who had hardly left his native state since birth. His request to have his son-in-law made Superintendent of Indian Affairs in Minnesota was opposed by the entire Minnesota congressional delegation, and Lincoln simply could not make the unprecedented move of appointing him in the face of such opposition. Bitterly disappointed, Dubois grumbled for years about Lincoln's treatment of him, but he did work for the President's reelection in 1864. He played a prominent role in Lincoln's funeral and was an active member of the National Lincoln Monument Association. Adelia Morris Dubois, Jesse's second wife, and Dubois himself remained friends of Mrs. Lincoln's throughout her unhappy widowhood.

Allen Miller, whose house is now next to Dubois's on the north, was a Sangamon County native (born in 1828). He and his wife Clarissa had seven children. He built his home around 1855. Miller dealt in leather goods, stoves, and tinware.

Julia Sprigg occupied the next house to the north. She was a widow, and her husband, Maryland native John C. Sprigg, had been a bank clerk. They had six children. Mrs. Sprigg herself had been born in Germany in 1815. Mr. Sprigg died in 1852, and Mrs. Sprigg moved to the house near the Lincolns in 1853. She became a friend of Mrs. Lincoln's, and her daughter often acted as babysitter for Tad and Willie Lincoln.

Charles Corneau's house, moved to prevent demolition in 1962, now sits next to the Lincoln home. He lived in the house from 1855 until his death in June, 1860. Corneau was Lincoln's druggist. He had also been a Whig in politics. Charles Corneau was born in Pennsylvania in 1826.

Almost nothing is known about Frederick Dean, but we do

know something about Lincoln's other neighbor across the street, Henson Lyon, who rented his home from Lemuel Ide. Lyon was a farmer who had resided two and one-half miles from Springfield after leaving Kentucky for Sangamon County in 1834. The home is famous for a post-Civil War resident, Samuel Rosenwald, the father of philanthropist Julius Rosenwald.

Many of the houses that stood near the Lincoln home in 1860 are gone now. The National Park Service may reconstruct a few of these, but most will have to be known from plat maps and census data, not from pleasant strolls through a tree-shaded historic site. In hopes of making this article a useful tool for the researcher, these now-phantom residents will be described in the following paragraphs. Those readers interested in this article primarily as a guide to the reconstructed Lincoln Home National Historic Site might want to turn to the last page for the concluding paragraphs on the site.

Moving northward from the Lincoln home, one finds the home sites of Henry Corrigan, Edward Bugg, Lotus Niles, Amos Worthen, Jesse Kent, and Mary Remann. Corrigan, born in Ireland in 1810, was retired by 1860. He was a good deal better off than his neighbor to the south, Abraham Lincoln. Corrigan valued his real estate at \$30,000. Bugg was a teamster. Born in England in 1812, he married a Virginian and had one son. He valued his real estate at \$4,000 in 1860, up from \$410 a decade before. By 1870 Bugg was a clerk. He seems to have been an ambitious and modestly successful man.

Lotus Niles, born in 1820, listed his occupation as "secretary" in the 1860 census. Whatever his precise duties,

they seem to have been remunerative, for he valued his real estate at \$7,000 and his personal property at \$2,500. Moreover, two female servants occupied his home along with his wife and three children. Amos Worthen was the State Geologist (he valued his real estate at \$5,000 in 1860). Jesse H. Kent was born in Ohio in 1812. A carriage-maker by trade, Kent valued his real estate at \$3,000 in 1860, up from \$350 in 1850, when he had listed his trade as "plough stocker." Kent had been a steady Whig in politics. The last house on Lincoln's block was Mary Remann's boarding house. A widow, Mrs. Remann had three children and rented rooms to John and Alexander Black.

Across Jackson Street to the south were the homes of Jared P. Irwin, John E. Roll, Jameson Jenkins, and Solomon Allen. Irwin had lived in Springfield briefly after 1837, when he laid bricks for the foundation of what is now the Old State Capitol. He returned to Pennsylvania, married, and moved back to Springfield in 1857. Irwin was an active Republican, an officer in Springfield's Lincoln Club in 1860. The Lincolns gave him as souvenirs some of their letters they were about to burn in preparation for their departure to Washington in 1861.

John E. Roll, born in New Jersey in 1814, had known Lincoln from the period of his earliest entry in Illinois. In 1831 Roll had helped Lincoln construct the flatboat he was to take to New Orleans for Denton Offutt. Roll moved to Springfield in 1831 and became a plasterer. He did well, valuing his real estate at \$4,750 in 1850, a figure well above that claimed by many of Lincoln's neighbors at that date. Eventually he became a contractor, building more than one hundred houses in Springfield. He was a steady Whig voter in the 1840s. The



Courtesy National Park Service

FIGURE 3. Julia Sprigg house.



Courtesy National Park Service

FIGURE 4. Allen Miller house.

Lincolns left their dog Fido with Roll when they departed for Washington in 1861.

Jameson Jenkins was born in North Carolina in 1810. He was married and had one daughter. Census takers noted the race of black and mulatto citizens, and the Jenkins family were listed as mulattoes. Mr. Jenkins was a drayman and drove Lincoln to the depot for his departure to Washington. His daughter married the son of Lincoln's barber William Florville. Solomon Allen, born in 1788, was a veteran of the War of 1812. He was a gunsmith. His barn still survives, but his house was demolished in the 1890s.

Across the street from the Lincolns lived William S. Burch, Ira Brown, and Ann J. Walters. Burch, born in 1814, was a clerk in a retail store (he valued his real estate at \$2,000 in 1860). Little is known about Ira Brown, Jr., or the widow Ann J. Walters, who had four children and valued her real estate at \$6,000 in 1860.

One of Abraham Lincoln's most notable qualities was his ability to transcend his environment. He was a common man, yet uncommon. His immediate environment is, nevertheless, always worthy of scrutiny. No one is completely exempt from the impress of his environment. Lincoln's neighborhood, it seems, contained both the expected and the unexpected. Many of its residents were substantial middling citizens who had steadily improved their economic lot. Men who had supported the Whig party predominated in the immediate neighborhood, just as they did in Springfield and Sangamon County as a whole. One might have expected the neighborhood to be more homogeneous in ethnic makeup, however. Persons born in Germany, England, and Ireland

were Lincoln's neighbors. So were mulattoes. Springfield may well have exposed Lincoln to a more complex variety of experiences than has been previously thought.

One suspects that more Americans learn history from historic sites than from books and lectures—especially after their years of formal schooling are over. Developing historic sites as the National Park Service now does is more than a matter of insulating the surviving reminders of this country's hallowed past from visual blight and from commercial exploitation heedless of authenticity. By enriching the memorials and monuments with the insights of the new social history, the National Park Service communicates an understanding of history that truly updates what the casual visitor may have learned in high school or college. All Lincoln students should acknowledge the distinguished role the National Park Service plays in keeping Americans abreast of the developments in the historical field which might otherwise remain the exclusive property of a handful of professional historians and devoted buffs.

It would be a mistake to end here and to underestimate the sheer pleasure involved in all this. No one who would take the trouble to visit the Lincoln sites in Springfield could fail to be impressed with the experience. If you have a chance, go there and see for yourself. If the timing is right, walk over to the Lincoln home around sundown. Tread the board sidewalks in relative solitude after the roar of the traffic on the busy street behind the home has subsided. Look at Lincoln's neighborhood in the twilight. You will likely remember the walk for the rest of your life.

